

favourite Dutch Guards back to Holland. The unwise reduction of the standing army to 7,000 Englishmen¹ coincided with the annulment of the first Partition Treaty by the death of the Electoral Prince of Bavaria, and William had good cause to complain of the blindness of Parliament. , During 1699-1700 the attention of politicians was focussed on the grants of land forfeited in Ireland. The report of the commission, states Macaulay, 'brought the nation nearer than it has ever since been to the verge of another revolution/'² At the same time the public was absorbed by accounts of the disasters which attended the Scottish expedition to Darien and the piracy of Captain Kidd. The effect of these unfortunate events, and of the passions they roused, is not exaggerated by Macaulay. At Madrid the ministers thought that William might be insulted with impunity : 'He could hardly be said to have an army. He could take no step which would require an outlay of money without the sanction of the House of Commons ; and it seemed to be the chief study of the House of Commons to cross him and to humble him/'³ To some extent William had himself to thank for this perversity of Parliament, for he deliberately kept his own ministers in ignorance of his diplomacy. A French memorandum on the affairs of England, written in 1698, says of

him : ' The Secretaries of State whom he has
had, if we
except the Duke of Shrewsbury, have been
only a hired
kind of clerks, who had only the despatch of
the current
affairs in the offices, and no share whatever in
his secrets,
which are in the hands of his Dutch
favourites/ ⁴

It does not appear that the confidence in
Shrewsbury
amounted to very much. In a letter of
January 8, 1695,

¹ VI, 2906 (xxiv).
191.

³ Cf. above, p. 145.

² Grimblot, i. 235-6, n. ; ii.

⁴ VI, 2890 (xxiv).